

Seventh Weber County Poultry Show

EGG CARTONS, CASES AND FILLERS

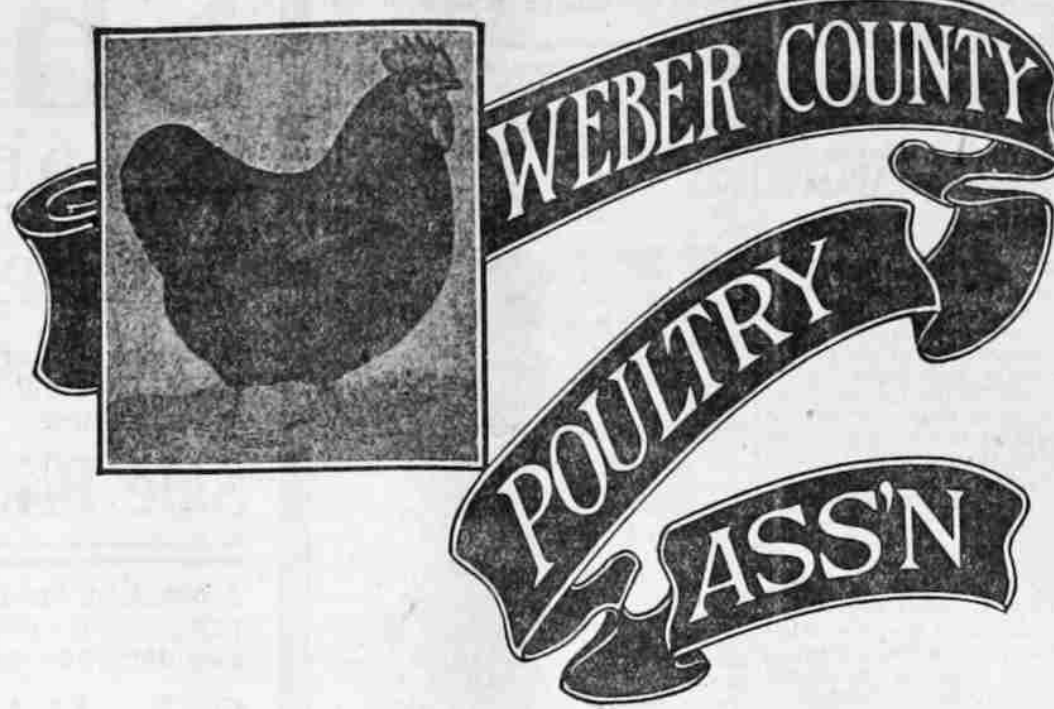
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POULTRY ALONG THE PACIFIC

THE PANIC IS FOLLOWED
BY BETTER SELLING METHODS
By Walter V. Woelke in Country Gentleman.

Last May they thought the poultry world was coming to a flaming ending thirty days. All the way up and down the Pacific coast, from the red-spruce patches of the Puyallup valley, in Washington, to the spineless-cactus acre of the Little Landers, in San Diego, white feathers were flying and bright red blood was flowing. The slaughter of the innocent pullets went on week after week. As wheat went up, the ax came down. Hundreds of producers sold their flocks and quit, convinced that wartime feed prices would make one of the fastest growing industries of the coast unprofitable for a long time to come.

The panic subsided in August, when feed came down, and the average price of fresh and storage eggs reached a level considered impossible two years ago. But Petaluma, the throbbing heart of the coast's chicken business, still palpitated and skipped many a beat. Not until late October did the surviving producers lift their eyes from the carnage and look ahead into the future. What they saw filled some of them with new courage. Today a good many are beginning to whistle again as they gather the eggs. The majority of those that weathered the storm are realizing that their position has been strengthened by the enforced elimination of the weaker ones, that close culling has improved the quality of the average flock, and that war prices for eggs and poultry may go high enough to cover the high cost of feed and labor.

It was wild and woolly while it lasted—this panic of the Pacific poultryment—but it's definitely over now. Production of Pacific shells has begun with renewed energy, even though one Petaluma feed dealer carries on his books outstanding accounts larger by a quarter million dollars this year than last.

Disaster Forces Co-operation. When one feed dealer in a small farming community can extend \$750,000 worth of credit just for chicken feed, and remain solvent, the poultry industry of California cannot be uprooted even by a blast from Mars.

The size of this feed dealer's operations illustrates the character of the far western hen business. It is not a side line, a by-product of the general farm. On the Pacific coast agriculture is specialized, and poultry is one of the specialties produced largely by specialists. The grain that is grown within hauling distance of Petaluma, Ingleswood, Hayward, California, or Puyallup, Washington, would not keep the flocks going for a half day, and the eggs produced on the vast wheat farms of the inland empire. In the barley, bean or orchard districts of California would not be sufficient to keep the Los Angeles tourist population in omelettes for one breakfast. Therefore the commercial plant supplies the egg market almost exclusively.

Petaluma, thirty miles north of San Francisco, demonstrated that 2500 White Leghorns on five acres of hardpan land could be made to support a family and leave a surplus for a dry winter, even against the competition of the middle western by-product. But Petaluma could not supply the poultry needs of California. Until another poultry center sprang up, carload importations continued. During the last five years, however, the example of Petaluma and the needs of the numerous five-acre farmers gave the Pacific coast poultry business so strong an impetus that the better known breeders could not supply the demand. Despite constant enlargements their output was sold for a year in advance. And, under the stimulus of the industrial east's insatiable appetite, California, in the early months of 1917, became a shipper instead of an importer of eggs.

The commercial egg-producing plant, handled efficiently by men and women who had bought and paid for their experience, turned out to be a big success all along the Pacific coast until the high feed prices descended upon the business. Then just about the time production was at low ebb in the fall of 1916, wheat joined the Mountaineers' club, and the poultrymen began to wail.

But they did not confine themselves to vocal exercise. Pushed by high feed prices and pulled by the state market director, they began to act. They organized. In Central California the owners of a million chickens formed a co-operative association; in Southern California more than 500 producers with 400,000 hens pooled their egg output; a thousand miles farther north, in the Puget Sound country, the producers got together to save the industry through improved marketing methods. Throughout the

winter months organization work went on, co-operation was planned in to the poultrymen's ears endlessly, and when the 1917 spring crop of eggs began to roll out of the nests the new organizations were ready for business.

During February and March of 1917 the poultry business flourished up and down the Pacific coast. The egg crop was the heaviest on record and prices were mounting continuously. Winter wheat had suffered, but the increased acreage of spring wheat promised to make good a large part of the shortage. The majority of the poultrymen, confident of a good harvest, continued to buy from hand to mouth. Only a few of the old hands in the business quietly bought ahead, put in a large supply of barley, kafir corn, milo maize and substituted the less expensive feeds for wheat.

In the meantime more than the usual quantity of eggs went into storage. In the average year about half of the California eggs produced during the heavy laying season from March to June find their way to the refrigerator rooms; last spring the proportion of stored eggs rose to almost sixty per cent, and in August the total holdings of the storage houses exceeded the quantity stored in 1916 by about 50,000 cases.

This surplus went into storage at prices that would have caused the poultrymen's hearts to leap with joy in normal times. During the preceding seven years the February wholesale price of eggs in Los Angeles had averaged less than twenty-two cents a dozen; in February, 1917, it reached thirty-five cents. On April 20, 1916, eggs were quoted at twenty-two and a half cents, on the same day in 1917 they brought thirty-four cents. All of which sounds extremely nice, but—

Wheat could be had for \$1.90 a sack in April, 1916; a year later it cost \$4.15. Corn had gone up from \$1.70 to \$2.75 a sack. Mash had climbed from \$1.90 to \$3.10 a sack. The average cost of feed had risen 101 per cent and the price of the product had increased only fifty-one per cent. According to the figures compiled by F. M. Newburg, manager of the Poultry Producers of Southern California, the commercial poultryman produced a dozen eggs at an average cost of sixteen and a half cents a dozen in 1916, and sold for twenty-two cents, leaving him an average profit of five and a half cents, a figure that probably was exceeded in the Petaluma district. In the first seven months of 1917 the producer averaged round twenty-four cents a dozen, but his production costs had risen to twenty-one cents, and more, leaving a profit of less than two cents a dozen on a much greater investment.

The Panic Is Over. And when the output began to decline, while feed prices stayed high, the exodus from the chicken ranch began. Within six months the three principal co-operative marketing associations lost two hundred of their members.

But by November, 1917, confidence was returning—slowly, 'tis true, but steadily just the same. An now given an increasing demand and a curtailed supply, with the Chinese egg totally eliminated as a factor, what will be the effect on the poultry industry of the Pacific coast, supposing feed goes no higher?

Senator W. H. Paulhaus, leader in the co-operative packing and marketing of small fruits and eggs in the state of Washington and president of the Washington Co-operative Egg and Poultry association, answers this question as follows:

"In my judgment the high price of eggs is proportionately high compared with the high price of feed. With pork chops at fifty cents a pound, and other meat in proportion, eggs certainly will command their full intrinsic value. I look for good fresh ranch eggs to be worth sixty and seventy-five cents a dozen—because the price of feed that chickens consume is high."

"The government has very wisely placed a fixed price on wheat, and, of necessity, upon bran and shorts and similar poultry feed supplies. This, in a measure, will save the poultry industry. We can purchase bran delivered at Puyallup at thirty dollars a ton, shorts at thirty-two dollars a ton, wheat at \$2.10 a bushel, corn at fifty-five dollars a ton, and with the present price of eggs and the prospects for the egg industry, these prices for poultry feed are not out of line, in my opinion."

"Breeders of standard-bred poultry in the Puget Sound country are not optimistic. In fact, at our fair held recently there was a extreme shortage of all fancy fowls, largely because many of the breeders have disposed of their flocks, although I think that the vision of the fancy breeders is narrow. In my judgment the poultry industry

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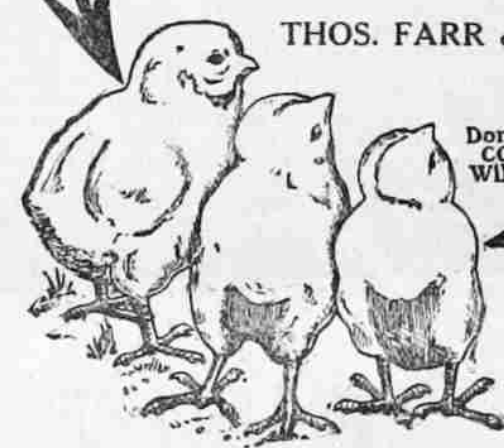
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